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SUBJECT: DIVIDED POLITICS ON THE EVE OF GHANA'S JUBILEE

ACCRA 00000484 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Heading into its Jubilee week, Ghanaian politics is heated and polarized. The ruling NPP party and the main opposition NDC party have recently offered contrasting views of the state of the nation. NDC presidential candidate John Atta Mills will participate in Jubilee activities, although former President Rawlings reportedly will not. End summary.

¶2. (U) Less than one week before the March 6 Jubilee celebration of Ghana's 50th anniversary and mid-way into President Kufuor's second term, the political atmosphere in Ghana is charged. The two main parties remain strongly divided about the state of the nation.

The President's State of the Nation Address

¶3. (U) On February 8, President Kufuor delivered his annual State of the Nation address to a half-empty parliament (the NDC was boycotting parliament -- see para 8). He declared "Ghana, the Black Star of Africa, is on the rise" and enumerated many successes: Ghana's selection as the AU Chair, Ghana's macroeconomic success (including its largest ever cocoa crop), large new investments by US companies like Cargill (cocoa processing) and Newmont Gold, and increased school enrollment. He also noted a number of problems: Ghana's energy crisis, pockets of conflict (mainly from chieftaincy disputes), low salaries and high unemployment.

¶4. (U) On the energy crisis, he addressed several long-term solutions as well as the shorter term solutions of purchasing 200 megawatts from the West African Power Pool, building two new power plants in Tema, and installing a 120 megawatt power barge. The GOG has contracted three U.S. companies to produce up to 100 megawatts by the end of April, he said (Note: some of this U.S. equipment has already arrived. End note.) Altogether, his plans called for an additional 500 megawatts, far in excess of the current shortfall but needed over the long term.

¶5. (U) In other economic highlights, Kufuor said two new biotech and accelerator labs will be built in the college of nuclear sciences. The GOG has backed a program to eliminate the worst forms of child labor and supported the disability bill, he said. The GOG has launched several significant water supply and road projects and expanded the National Health Insurance Scheme. Kufuor highlighted the signing of the MCA compact as good for the whole country and a major boost to job creation. He noted that the AGOA Forum is

coming up later this year. Ghana plans to build a fiber optic backbone with a \$30 million loan from China and plans to privatize Westel and Ghana telecom this year, he said.

¶16. (U) Kufuor stressed the importance of good governance, pledging to strengthen local government and funding for the police. He said the government was "determined to eradicate the menace of drugs."

¶17. (U) He concluded with the need to celebrate the Jubilee, admonishing "we should be careful not to be known as those that know the cost of everything and the value of nothing." He acknowledged Ghana had fallen short and had difficulties, but claimed Ghanaians should celebrate the fact that the country had recovered its path and should take pride in the country. He hoped the NDC would return to parliament.

NDC Frustrated and Demoralized

¶18. (SBU) The NDC has become increasingly frustrated. On February 5, former NDC Trade and Industry Minister Daniel Abodakpi was sentenced to ten years with hard labor for allegedly defrauding the state of \$400,000. The NDC saw the decision as politically motivated and all 94 NDC MPs walked out of parliament for two weeks. On February 14, the NDC offered its own "True State of the Nation" depicting Ghana's situation as "a picture of desperation and despair, doom and gloom of the future with dark clouds of fear and insecurity." The report criticized the NPP for supporting selective justice targeting the NDC, for failing to tackle corruption or violent crime, for energy shortages and other economic problems, and for alleged lack of accountability in Jubilee funds and other major GOG projects.

¶19. (U) NDC Minority leader Albin Bagbin recently emphasized to PolChief that he was "worried about the country," arguing

ACCRA 00000484 002.2 OF 002

that civil society is being muted and Kufuor surrounds himself with people who misinform him. The NDC is angry that it was not consulted about the Jubilee celebration and that the NPP mocked its February 14 State of the Nation statement, Bagbin said.

¶10. (SBU) On February 15, a large delegation of prominent citizens called on former President Rawlings and a group of 16 NDC leaders, including NDC presidential candidate John Atta Mills. They reportedly offered an open invitation, on behalf of the government, for Rawlings to attend any and all Jubilee events. According to Rawlings Special Aide and Public Affairs Director Victor Smith, who was in the meeting, Rawlings, Mills and others were impressed by the prominence of the individuals but were frustrated that they lacked details about the invitation (and did not have a written invite). The NDC officials "took them to task" for three hours, highlighting a litany of problems in the country, according to Smith.

¶11. (SBU) Bagbin told PolChief he had worked with National Security Minister Francis Poku to craft an acceptable invitation to include Rawlings in the Jubilee event. However, none of this plan was reportedly reflected in the invitation extended by the group of eminent citizens to the former president. In the end, Rawlings felt that the NPP has "demonized" him, making it difficult to participate in the Jubilee without significant gestures of inclusion and dialogue which were not offered, according to Bagbin.

¶12. (SBU) According to Smith, Rawlings did not respond to the invitation during the meeting with Kufuor's emissaries. Smith and others have told us Rawlings has decided against attending Jubilee events. Rawlings reportedly does not want to be on the dais with President Kufuor, whom he feels has offended him in many ways, including an ongoing effort to imprison his wife. He does not want to be hypocritical about his participation nor does he want to create a scene or

sulk, according to Smith.

¶13. (SBU) Smith confirmed information from other NDC sources that NDC presidential candidate and former Vice President John Atta Mills will attend the Jubilee parade and reception, "with reservations". According to his close confidants, Mills feels that his participation in the Jubilee was necessary as a presidential candidate and he hopes it will help him gain recognition among international visitors.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) The NDC decision to participate in Jubilee events came after long deliberations and reflects a compromise (as Smith told PolChief, the issue of Rawlings' participation was seen as totally different from the party's role). It will help improve the political atmosphere next week. According to the March 1 Statesman newspaper, Rawlings has changed his mind and will now participate in Jubilee activities. Victor Smith told Pol FSN he has no information to confirm this report. While Rawlings is unpredictable, we would be surprised if he attends next week's event, given his deep, personal sense of grievance and the country's polarized politics.

¶15. (SBU) Some Ghanaians are beginning to get into a celebratory spirit. Vendors are selling commemorative shirts, books, souvenirs and Ghanaian flags. The news reports that Stevie Wonder and other celebrities will be in town. On the political front, parliament's passage of a domestic violence bill after years of discussion is a major positive development. However, the divisions between the NDC and NPP have compounded other events over the past month -- the murder of a prominent journalist, energy shortages, widespread questioning about the use of Jubilee funds, and late and disorganized planning for Jubilee events -- which have soured the atmosphere in Accra on the eve of Ghana's big celebration. Outside of Accra, the Jubilee seems hardly noticed.

BRIDGEWATER